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[] EURA.WE. [] 17 March 1986

Talking Points for ADDI

FRANCE: Legislative Elections

France's five-year experiment with Socialism ended on Sunday when legislative elections returned a razor-thin majority for the conservative coalition. Low voter turnout, the new French proportional voting system, and the right's lackluster campaign probably played a key role in the coalition's poorer-than-expected showing.

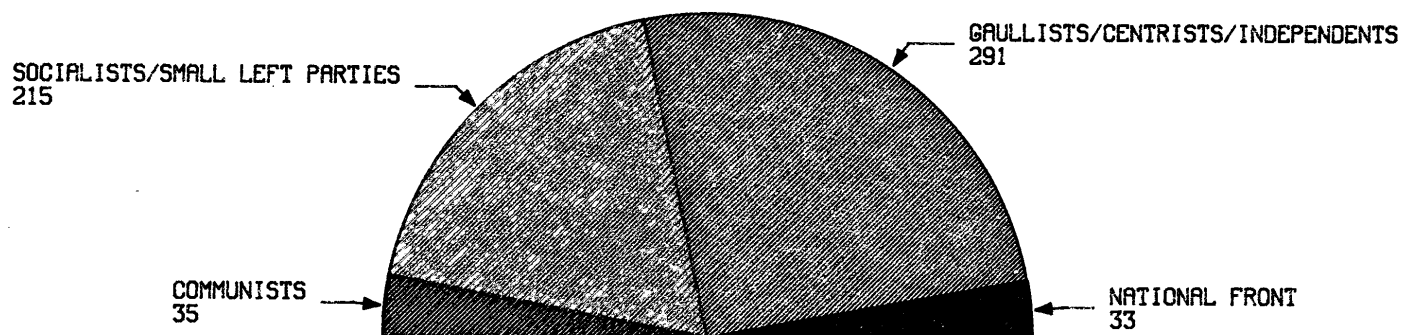
- We also believe that a week of national anxiety over the French hostages in Lebanon distorted voting patterns on the right, giving ten seats that would have gone to the conservatives to the racist, anti-Arab National Front.
- Socialists on the other hand seem to have succeeded in their "vote usefully" slogan, picking up a number of additional seats from the Communists, who stumbled to an historic low.

The narrowness of the conservative coalition's majority will strengthen Socialist President Mitterrand's hand, as he prepares to govern with a hostile parliament--virtually ensuring a prolonged period of political uncertainty in France as Prime Minister and President search for a modus vivendi. Mitterrand may, for example, try to choose as his prime minister a conservative who will be easier to deal with than frontrunner Jacques Chirac.

- He announced yesterday that he would name a prime minister today, from among the conservative majority.
- Although managing a wafer-thin majority will be difficult, Gaullist leader Chirac is likely to insist on the job and must still be considered the frontrunner.
- Given the delicate balance with the still-powerful Mitterrand, whoever tries to make this slim majority work will have to move very cautiously. We expect this to delay implementation of the conservative program, which aims to roll back nationalizations and some other Socialist reforms.
- Conservatives are also likely to concede to Mitterrand--at least for the time being--control of foreign and defense affairs, as they try to consolidate their dominance of domestic affairs. This, we believe, will assure a basic continuity of foreign and security policy, which in any case is based on a broad left-right consensus.

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FRENCH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS AFTER 16 MARCH ELECTION



3 SEATS IN OVERSEAS TERRITORIES REMAIN UNDECIDED